

## Lifestyle has an impact

There is no question that lifestyle and some of the inner mental habits we acquire have an impact on our mental health. We all have many frustrations in life and many problems we can't do anything about. But worrying can become a habit that's hard to break. We all know people who have a gloomy pessimistic outlook on everything. "Expect the worst and hope for the best" is their motto. Sometimes, though, it seems that they spend so much time expecting the worst that they are almost disappointed if things work out for the best.

Try to face up to problems and deal with them. Pushing them to one side can build up a load of emotional "baggage" that will eventually drag you down. Also recognize that in certain circumstances depression is normal and has to be worked through. On the death of a loved one, for instance, it's common for the bereaved person to have bouts of depression—often quite severe. Depression at a time like this is part of the mourning process and should not be denied.

People who set a heavy pace in their lives need to learn to relax, too. Our systems can't keep up with steady pressure indefinitely without problems.

There is much you can do to cope with depression. You can recognize your own mood. You can try to identify problems and worries whenever you can. And you can try to do something about them. Other people can often give a lot of support to make problems seem easier.

There are services available when you need help. But there are many things you can do to help yourself, or a loved one, cope with problems and make life worth living again.



Ontario

## Better health for a better life

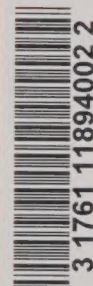
Ministry of  
Health

Dennis R. Timbrell,  
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# DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

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## What depression is

Almost everyone gets “blue,” “down” or depressed at times. The world looks forbidding. Life is a struggle. Nothing comes easily. We lose confidence in our ability to do things, and we may lose confidence in ourselves.

But as we get to know ourselves better, we come to realize that those days pass, and on another day we can feel optimistic and the world seems to run along more smoothly.

Mood changes are part of the normal round of living and coping with the daily problems and worries of life. They can be related to physical factors. For example, any physical illness, under certain circumstances, could cause changes in your mood. As we become more familiar with our own functioning we can learn to recognize certain worries or changes that can bring on bouts of depression. But sometimes they occur for no apparent reason.

## How it affects the aged

Depression is by far the most common psychiatric disorder in the aged. For that matter, it's probably the most common in any age group, but particularly so in older people. As people get older, their physical health declines. They lose their sense of independence and their work value in society is reduced. They frequently become increasingly ignored by the younger people around them. So it's extremely important that they are allowed to maintain their family contacts and that they continue to be included in family life whenever possible. As well, they need other places in society where they can make some sort of contribution, which goes a long way to helping most older people deal with depression.

## When it's a problem

As you might expect some people have more pronounced mood changes than others. A depression may become so deep that you can't just “snap yourself out of it”. People can suffer to the point where they are so preoccupied with their own feelings that they can no longer look at the world objectively. They may feel hopeless and worthless and even unwilling or unable to ask for help. The thought of suicide may enter their minds, although only a few do anything about it. This is a serious state of depression that requires outside help.

## These are the signs

You can learn to recognize the signs both in yourself and in people close to you. Usually there is a change in a person's normal spirits and approach to life. Sometimes it's fairly sudden and easy to recognize. Sometimes it's so gradual that to recognize it you must think to yourself — “What was he or she like six months ago? one year ago?”

## Look for these changes in habits or interests

- inability to make decisions
- sleeplessness, characterized by early morning waking and restlessness
- anxiety, especially in the first half of the day
- loss of interest in things that used to be interesting, including loss of appetite in food and sex
- upsets in the physical system like constipation
- extreme preoccupation with the past, with guilt about failures or inadequacies
- gloomy, pessimistic mood, with sadness and the inability to restrain tears

## What can be done

If there is evidence of a depression being deeper and lasting longer than normal mood swings, it should not be ignored. Early intervention usually means more rapid recovery. Efforts should be made by family or close friends to talk to the person and express interest and concern. In a deep depression that may not be effective, and it could be frustrating for the family, because the person is not able to think problems through clearly. It may be impossible to have a logical discussion with him or her.

At this point professional help should be sought without delay. Hopefully the depressed person will recognize the problem and will seek help—perhaps with some persuasion, which should be tried first. But if depression is severe, or if the person has made any references to suicide, it may be necessary for family or close friends to make a decision to get help, without delay.

## Who to go to

The first line of defence is family or close personal friends, who may be able to help through sympathetic understanding. If this kind of help is unsuccessful, then your family physician should be consulted. A family physician can often treat mild depression or may refer you, or the person you are concerned about, to a psychiatrist or psychiatric hospital or clinic. Counselling or social service agencies can also help or give advice. Religious counsellors, a priest, rabbi or minister, may be able to guide people to the help they need. And most larger communities have a telephone distress centre manned 24 hours a day.

